

Bully Creek Landscape Area Management Project

AGENCY: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Vale District
INVOLVED PARTIES: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Malheur Watershed Council, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Livestock Permittees, and Environmental Groups
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DATES: *Began:* 1999- Field assessment began *Ended:* Ongoing
INTERNET SITE: None

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Bully Creek Landscape Area Management Project (LAMP) within the Malheur Resource Area, Vale District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), represents ground-level resource planning for public lands. The Bully Creek landscape area is located northwest of Vale, Oregon. It includes eight watersheds in the Bully Creek subbasin and a portion of one watershed in the lower Malheur subbasin. The landscape area consists of 386,300 acres, of which 268,800 acres are public land. Twenty grazing allotments comprising 108 pastures managed by the BLM occur within the landscape area. This project was designed and implemented using the adaptive management (AM) principles and management direction described in two large broad-scale planning efforts (the *Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project Eastside Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (USDA/DOI 1997 and the *Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan* [SEORMP] and record of decision [ROD] 2002).

The LAMP focused on (1) developing Water Quality Management Plans to meet Oregon Department of Environmental Quality standards for water quality to comply with the Clean Water Act, (2) implementing the *Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (DOI/BLM 1997), and (3) conducting allotment evaluations and address livestock grazing through the Allotment Management Plan process.

The LAMP was fully implemented in 2001 with new livestock grazing schedules and work beginning on numerous range improvement projects. Since implementation, AM strategies have been used to meet goals and objectives through planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. One strategy is, for example, if degraded riparian areas are not showing progress toward meeting goals and objectives, adjustments will be made including change of season of use or pasture rest. The LAMP relies heavily on annual monitoring with progress reviews of grazing schedules at 3-, 5- and 7-year intervals. During the third evaluation of the LAMP, AM strategies were used to make adjustments in season of use for livestock grazing and allow for pasture rest where monitoring targets have not been met.

General land management actions that are being considered include mechanical control-sagebrush, mechanical control-juniper, seedings-native and nonnative, plantings of forbs and shrubs, prescribed burns-sagebrush, juniper, aspen and forest, annual rangeland reseeding, water developments, and weed control. Grazing management actions being considered include manage intensity of grazing, range readiness limitations, reduced or increased livestock use, periodic grazing deferment or rest rotation, limit utilization on native uplands, limit utilization on seedings, limit utilization during hot and late seasons on riparian areas, limit utilization in sage grouse habitat in April and May, avoid livestock use from December to March in critical deer/pronghorn/sage grouse winter range, pasture fences, enclosure fences, and fence removal.

Through the AM process and implementation of numerous range improvement projects, including juniper cutting, prescribed burning, fuels management, fencing, brush beating and reseeding, and fencing, numerous riparian areas and upland areas are showing significant improvement.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT (AM) ELEMENTS:

What management issue was the primary driver?

How to improve vegetation, water quality, and wildlife habitat in sensitive riparian and upland areas within the Bully Creek Geographic Management Area.

What uncertainties led to an Adaptive Management approach being selected?

Uncertainty as to which management strategies would best meet our goals. For example, through our annual monitoring, we are finding that early to late spring livestock grazing is compatible with most riparian and upland objectives if upland utilization is limited to 30 percent. We are also finding that early spring burning greatly enhances aspen stands, and temporary exclosures need to be in place for three growing seasons to mitigate the effects of big game herbivores.

How was the monitoring and science framework designed to support timely management adjustments to changing resource conditions and increased certainty?

The results of our monitoring efforts are evaluated at the landscape scale to determine the overall health of the area at 3-, 5- and 7-year intervals. An analysis of the monitoring data is used to make recommendations on whether to continue current management or what changes may be needed in management practices to meet goals and objectives. To complete the AM cycle, if areas (for example, a degraded riparian area) are not showing progress toward meeting the desired range of future conditions, adjustments will be made. The adjustments include a wide array of options (change in grazing seasons, reduction in numbers, or suspension) as shown in the plan and referenced in the proposed action of the EA.

Please describe the process used for involving partners/stakeholders.

We closely coordinate involvement through meetings, written correspondence, and presentations for local watershed groups. During the third-year evaluation, BLM coordinated with all interested parties and affected interests through written correspondence, meetings, and phone call discussions. Through consultation with the stakeholders (i.e., livestock permittees) at meetings, we discussed monitoring data, provided new information, and shared ideas. We have also done this with other partners including environmental groups.

Please describe the mechanism for adapting decisions based on monitoring results. Was an Environmental Management System (EMS) used?

The Bully Creek LAMP project follows an EMS model that was incorporated into the SEORMP, outlining processes for planning, implementation, monitoring/corrective action, and management review. BLM district staff developed monitoring to address both short-term and long-term goals within the Bully Creek LAMP area. The AM program described in the Bully Creek LAMP includes measurable resource management objectives (such as stubble height, vegetation cover, etc.) and includes other defined and measurable management prescriptions (such as allotment of animal unit months, time of use, and other permitting criteria). Annual monitoring data for upland and riparian areas are collected, presented to the permittees and interested members of the public,

and incorporated into the required progress review, and proposals or recommendations for changing grazing schedules are normally made during the subsequent grazing season. For example, if monitoring targets were exceeded, pastures were closed to grazing for a 2-year period and/or adjustments in grazing schedules were made.

Was the AM approach established as a result of a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process (analysis and documentation supporting the decision to implement the AM)? If so, how did the NEPA process address subsequent adaptive decisions and actions?

Yes, AM was a result of an Environmental Assessment (EA). Assessing the impacts of all these issues involved AM, particularly in the grazing management actions. BLM initially proposed changes in livestock season and duration of use, rather than changes in livestock numbers to resolve grazing issues. Where changes in seasons of use and duration of use did not, of themselves, resolve rangeland health issues, other adjustments could be made. These included a wide array of options from land management actions to reduction or suspension of livestock use. All of these options were discussed in the LAMP NEPA document and approved in the ROD. AM allowed the field manager to select multiple options to resolve an issue if monitoring showed no progress toward meeting objectives. The NEPA document analyzed these multiple options available to the field manager. No additional NEPA document was needed to implement the proposed action.

Has the AM approach been evaluated in a subsequent NEPA process? If so, what has AM contributed to the NEPA process?

The 2002 resource management plan for the Malheur Resource Area (SEORMP) applied AM beyond rangeland management, to include air resources, fire, forest and woodlands, recreation, and cultural resources. This extends the advantages of using AM to address needed changes without conducting additional NEPA analysis as long as proposed actions and associated impacts were addressed within the resource management plan/environmental impact statement (RMP/EIS) and step-down EA that is tiered to the SEORMP. In addition, as long as management adjustments were made within the scope of what was analyzed in the EA, no further NEPA analysis is required. However, any changes made outside of the initial scope of the original EA would require a new EA. Most management adjustments that have been implemented have been within the range of actions analyzed in the LAMP EA, but a few have not. For example, a rancher's request to amend his permit to allow grazing outside the AM time-of-use provisions triggered additional NEPA compliance for the new term permit.

If the AM approach has not been evaluated through NEPA, are there plans for doing so? If so, briefly describe those plans and how other environmental requirements (e.g., Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, wetlands, floodplains, environmental justice) have been complied with?

The new resource management plan for the Malheur Resource Area (SEORMP) has provided the vehicle to address needed changes through the AM process without conducting additional NEPA analysis as long as proposed actions and associated impacts were addressed within the RMP/EIS and step-down EA that is tiered to the SEORMP. Environmental requirements have been addressed in the RMP/EIS.

RESULTS:

Benefits provided by AM to date (i.e., reduced uncertainty, improved project efficiency and efficacy compared with other management options):

The use of AM under the LAMP NEPA document was very successful. For example, AM allowed the BLM to make timely adjustments in grazing schedules and project implementation to meet resource objectives. AM also gave the BLM the ability to act quickly when monitoring showed targets were not being met. As long as management adjustments were made within the scope of what was analyzed in the EA, no further NEPA analysis was required. However, any changes made outside of the initial scope of the original EA required a new EA. Monitoring data suggest that natural resources are in much better condition than if the AM program were not being implemented.

Limitations of using AM:

Time and labor requirements are high for collecting monitoring data and drafting progress reviews.

Financial cost of implementing AM:

Exact costs are not available. Costs are associated with field monitoring to support decisions to make needed management changes. Labor costs are associated with preparing additional NEPA work such as the Determination of NEPA Adequacy.

How did the AM approach affect the timeline for managing the system?

AM does require time to make informed decisions through collecting, analyzing, and summarizing field data to make appropriate management decisions. However, AM provides flexibility that can ultimately shorten the decision time frame.

Degree of stakeholder buy-in:

Stakeholder acceptance is mixed. Interested members of the public and affected interests generally support the AM approach because it allows changes to be implemented more quickly without revisiting NEPA. Environmental groups are generally supportive of the AM approach. Some ranchers are supportive of the management and permitting flexibility the AM program offers. In fact, some ranchers have come forward with innovative ideas that had not occurred to managers. Those ideas, which have fallen within the parameters of the AM program, have been able to be implemented expeditiously. However, there are other ranchers who are reluctant to implement measures of the AM program, primarily because they believe adopting certain practices will reduce profit margins.

CHALLENGES:

What impediments, constraints, and/or challenges were overcome? How?

The workload associated with monitoring and follow-up data analysis and drafting progress reviews. Limited funding to implement projects is an ongoing challenge. Challenges were overcome by partnering with two interested members of the public that contributed funds to support monitoring and data analysis effort. We will be looking for more partners. Funding from the National Fire Plan assisted in implementation of fuels management projects.

What aspects of the project need improvement?

Resources to complete the process fully.

How and when will the need for improvement be addressed, if at all?

Through the budget process and workforce priority. The resource area has made the Bully Creek AM process a high priority and continues to fund the monitoring work needed to implement AM, even though the overall budget is being reduced.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION/REFERENCES:

U.S. Department of the Interior/Bureau of Land Management. 2000. *The Bully Creek Landscape Area Management Project (LAMP) Record of Decision*. DOI/BLM Vale District Office, Vale, OR.

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Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands in Oregon and Washington. 1997. Oregon State Office, Portland, OR.